



Comhairle Cathrach
Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City Council

Report to Arts, Culture, Leisure
and Recreation SPC
24th July 2023
Item No. 5

**Report to the Arts and Culture
Strategic Policy Committee**

Proposal for a Harry Clarke Museum of Irish Stained Glass

**To be located at the former Dublin Writers Museum Premises
No. 18 Parnell Square North**

24 July 2023

1. Harry Clarke

Dublin-born stained glass artist and illustrator, **Harry Clarke** (1889-1931), is recognised internationally as a genius of his age, for his supreme work in the medium of stained glass. His skill and unique vision is unsurpassed and his art is instantly recognizable, because of its outstanding originality. His pioneering techniques and brilliant execution of stained glass panels has earned him a global reputation. Clarke's stained glass work can be found in Dublin, all over Ireland, the UK, the US and Australia.

In addition to his stained glass, Clarke is famous for his illustrative work, which accompanies the writings of literary figures such as Edgar Allan Poe, Hans Christian Andersen and others. His work is sought after and highly prized amongst collectors. Clarke's art is fantastical, original, dark, subversive, erotic and witty, and his illustration of the secular and the sacred, at a time of repression in Ireland, is intriguing and controversial. Like writers such as Synge, O'Casey and Yeats, Clarke's outlook was cosmopolitan and he made a huge contribution to shaping the international reputation of Ireland as a modern sovereign state.

Harry Clarke's windows and book illustrations have entered public consciousness and his appeal is wide-ranging, yet it is difficult to encounter his work in one place and at close quarters. Most of Clarke's stained glass windows must be sought out in churches.

Harry Clarke had a strong association with the north inner city area of Dublin. His father Joshua Clarke established the Clarke stained glass studios at 33 North Frederick Street in 1887, and later at 6 and 7 North Frederick Street where the Clarke studios continued in operation until 1973. The young Harry Clarke attended school, first at Marlborough Street Model School and then at Belvedere College. With the establishment of a rival stained glass cooperative, **An Túr Gloine** (Tower of Glass), by the artist Sarah Purser in 1903 on Pembroke Street, the production of stained glass reached new heights and has left Ireland with a rich legacy of precious stained glass works.

2. Dublin Writers Museum Premises No 18 Parnell Square

No 18 Parnell Square North is a terraced four bay, four storey over basement building constructed in c1765 and extensively refurbished in c1890. It is a protected structure. It has a more modern extensive four storey extension to the rear, which is not protected. The building abuts Findlater's Church on one side and No 19 Parnell Square North, which houses the Irish Writers' Centre, on the other. It has two self-contained residential apartments on the top floor.

Nos 18 & 19 Parnell Square North are owned by Fáilte Ireland. Chapter One restaurant occupies the basement of No 18. The balance of the building was occupied by the Dublin Writer's Museum, but this closed when MoLI opened. The Dublin Writers' Museum collection is currently being relocated by Fáilte Ireland and the building will be 'vacant' by end August 2023.

Fáilte Ireland has offered to sell No. 18 Parnell Square North to the City Council for a nominal sum on condition that it is used for tourism purposes.

The building is in excellent condition but it will need upgrading/refurbishment work to update services to comply with current standards, to provide disability access, to allow for proper visitor flow, visitor access management, learning outreach and events management and to support proper display of the collection.

3. A Harry Clarke Museum of Irish Stained Glass

It is considered that Clarke's legacy deserves full recognition by Dublin, the city of his birth, with the establishment of a **Harry Clarke Museum of Irish Stained Glass**. His work and that of the Clarke studios along with examples of ground breaking stained glass creations by other Irish stained glass artists, would make for an exciting and dynamic museum. Audiences would enjoy and gain a deeper understanding the works of Harry Clarke, his working methods and how stained glass is made. This could include learning about the stories reflected in his compositions, seeing behind the scenes' sketches and drawings and facilitating other stained glass makers and artists. The museum would be continuously enlivened by temporary exhibitions and contemporary responses to Harry Clarke.

With the availability of No. 18 Parnell Square North Dublin City Council has a unique window of opportunity to develop a stained glass museum dedicated to Harry Clarke and his contemporaries and to save for posterity and for future generations of Dubliners, a unique and vital part of the city's cultural, artistic and manufacturing history and heritage. Dublin stained glass artists like Harry Clarke and the key members of An Túr Gloine studio, Wilhelmina Geddes, Evie Hone and Michael Healy, excelled in the medium, making the city one of the most significant producers of stained glass windows in Europe, and exporting world-wide.

The museum has the potential to become a major destination in Dublin for both international and local audiences, as well as schools, scholars, researchers, designers and artists. It would provide visitors with an educational experience in the process of stained glass, which remains little known. The work of contemporary stained glass artists would also be featured to make it relevant to the present day.

This museum offers an opportunity to capitalise on the huge international and national interest in Clarke; to be the 'go to' place to explore his work; to preserve and display Clarke's work to a high conservation standard; to form links nationally and internationally with the diaspora; to develop an exciting education programme around the arts and crafts movement; to develop a dynamic and multi-faceted exhibition programme that forms links with other arts institutions such as the Hugh Lane Gallery, the National Gallery, the Gate Theatre, the Abbey Theatre, MoLI, the National Library and the Crawford Gallery, Cork.

The proposed museum will also complement the Parnell Square Cultural Quarter development.

4. Access to Harry Clarke etc. Material.

Dublin City Council owns an excellent collection of work by Harry Clarke and other relevant artists within the collections of the Hugh Lane Gallery, Dublin City Libraries and Dublin City Archives, which, subject to agreement with the Board of the Hugh Lane Gallery and the City Librarian, will form the core the new museum's collection. Key elements of this material include the following:

- The magnificent 'Eve of St Agnes' window is a spectacular feat of stained glass workmanship and imagination created by Clarke in 1924. This will be one of the star attractions.
- The 'Geneva Window' panel, 'Mr Gilhooley', which was originally intended for Clarke's Geneva Window (now in the collection of Wolfsonian Museum Miami Florida).
- The original set of nine watercolour designs for the panels in the Geneva Window.
- The original preparatory watercolour design for the 'Eve of St. Agnes.'

- Book illustration drawings for Goethe's Faust.
- A small self-portrait drawing
- The Harry Clarke archive acquired from David Clarke, the son of Harry Clarke. There are 884 items in the archive including
 - 45 largescale drawings (over 2 metres) including the original cartoon drawings for the stained glass windows in Honan Chapel, Cork and the original cartoons for 'The Last Judgement' for St Patrick's Church, Newport, Co. Mayo
 - Book illustrations.
 - Drawings for the stained glass windows in the Chapel of the Novitiate, St Mary Immaculate, Belcamp, Co. Dublin
- Drawings for 14 other stained glass windows including one by Margaret Clarke who was primarily known for her paintings.
- 4 paintings by Margaret Clarke, Harry Clarke's wife.
- A full collection of Ireland's Memorial Records, 1914-1918, published in an edition of 100 eight-volume sets. The Records are notable for stunning and elaborate page decorations by Harry Clarke.

These works will be thoughtfully and imaginatively displayed to best advantage complying to best international museum standards. As well as environmental controls, innovative designs for display of the diverse material, availing of new digital technologies, will be crucial for the success of the museum. The museum's collection of Clarke material will, over the years, be enhanced by strategic acquisitions and loans which will add to the richness of all the collection and the museum. Contact has been made with private owners of Harry Clarke stained glass windows. They have indicated that will be well disposed to loaning windows to the new museum.

Harry Clarke's direct descendants have indicated support of the proposed museum and informal contact with the relevant staff at the National Gallery of Ireland and Trinity College Dublin confirms their support too and that the possibility of lending material from their collections to the proposed museum.

It is expected that many churches will close over the coming years, a trend already established. Some churches are being repurposed but many will not be adaptable and new homes will be sought for the stained glass contained within. Indications are that with the establishment of a museum, there would be the opportunity to facilitate donations and acquisitions and save these unique items from leaving the country permanently, going into long-term storage or being sold to private collectors. A museum would appeal to churches as their cherished windows, often having been gifted in the first instance, would be saved for posterity and remain on view to an appreciative Irish – and overseas – audience, secure in a state-of-the-art museum facility.

As a quintessential Dublin artist who made an enormous contribution, Clarke's legacy is unmatched and deserves full recognition by the city of his birth. The proposed museum will give him that recognition.

5. Proposed Actions

Subject to the agreement of the SPC to the proposal to develop a Harry Clarke Museum of Irish Stained Glass at No 18 Parnell Square North it is proposed to proceed as follows:

- (i) To purchase No 18 Parnell Square North from Fáilte Ireland (for a nominal sum) for the purpose of housing a Harry Clarke Museum of Irish Stained Glass. (It is intended that Chapter One restaurant will continue to operate in the basement of No 18).
- (ii) To allocate responsibility for delivery of the development phase of the project to the Dublin City Council Culture Company.
- (iii) To establish a Project Development Group to oversee the development phase of the project. The Group will have with the following membership:
 - 1. The Chair of the Arts and Culture SPC,
 - 2. The Director of the Hugh Lane Gallery or her nominee,
 - 3. The Chief Executive of the Dublin City Council Culture Company or her nominee,
 - 4. The City Librarian or her nominee,
 - 5. The City Arts Officer or his nominee and
 - 6. The Chief Executive or his nominee
- (i) To recruit a Project Lead to manage the development phase of the museum (estimated period of 2/3 years). The individual appointed will:
 - a. Be the lead contact between the Project Development Group and the integrated Design Team for the required building works.
 - b. Plan the overall visitor experience, stories, visitor flow and conduct potential visitor research and/or situation analysis of a visitor offer.
 - c. Develop, in conjunction with the Project Development Steering Group, the curatorial and operational models for the project's future.
 - d. Be responsible for establishing the new museum's collection and
 - e. Oversee all artistic/curatorial issues.

Margarita Cappock
Assistant Arts Officer